

Current

Trust fund to 'fortify' pubmedia FCC's Broadband Plan proposes major giveback of TV spectrum

By Dru Sefton

The FCC gives several nods to public broadcasting in its ambitious new National Broadband Plan, but makes clear that the system needs to transform itself into its next incarnation of "public media" to fulfill its potential for public service.

Several of the plan's 17 recommendations could directly affect pubcasting. The FCC is advising Congress to:

n Give broadcasters incentives to surrender some of their spectrum for auctions. Use proceeds from public broadcasters' channels to endow a trust fund "to fortify public media across platforms";

n Amend the federal Copyright Act to update pubcasting exemptions for online and broadcast distribution and archiving of content, giving "reasonable noncommercial downstream usage rights for this content to the American people"; and

n Increase federal funding to public media. "As broadband adoption and utilization continue to grow," the Broadband Plan notes, "public media will require greater and more flexible funding to support new digital platforms." Pubcasting now receives less than 20 percent of its revenue from Congress, the plan says, but it doesn't suggest how much more is needed or where the funds would come from.

The much-anticipated document of more than 350 pages, crafted by an FCC task force after months of public input and research, is online at broadband.gov/plan. It asserts that high-speed Internet connectivity for every American is now a necessity:



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Mike Petersen (above) not only leads UEN but uses it to teach a poli sci class 80 miles away at Utah State.

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"Like electricity a century ago, broadband is a foundation for economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness and a better way of life." It seeks to extend high-capacity connection, at a rate of 100 Megabits per second (mbps) to 100 million homes by 2020. Right now the majority of the country's Internet subscribers have service of three to 10 mbps. According to the FCC, 93 million Americans, about a third of the

population, do not have broadband service at home, and 14 million Americans have no access to broadband.

Though advocates say the plan will have bipartisan appeal, it requires action by Congress, which has fought across the aisle for months over what rights Americans can claim in health care.

Hearings on the plan begin this week in Congress: Tuesday, March 23, in the Senate